

CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

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NO. 30.

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another, as I have loved you—JOHN xiii. 34.

FOR THE CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

SKETCHES NO. XII.

"Beloved, let us love one another." 1 John chap. 10. v. 7.

Another obligation to the duty of loving one another, arises from the new relation, in which we stand to each other as christians. Before, we were obliged to love God and to do good to each other, as partakers of the same common nature; but christianity obliges us, to look upon ourselves as brethren in a peculiar and more exalted sense, as being all the children of God, in Christ, all members of the same body, all partakers of the same spirit, and heirs of the same blessed hope of immortality. The last motive, that I shall mention, to universal love and charity, is the great stress, which our Saviour lays upon this duty, recommending it to us in a particular manner above all others, as being the most necessary and indispensable qualification of a sincere christian. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love, one to another.

All the time he was upon the earth, executing his ministerial office, he went about doing good, leaving us an example, which he indispensably requires us to follow. And the apostles every where declare, that love and good will to mankind, is the principal aim and design of our whole religion, and that, whosoever is deficient in this excellent virtue, all his pretences to religion are vain and useless, and the reason, why so particular a stress is laid upon the practice of this great duty, is plain, because it is that temper and disposition of mind, which exalts the nature of man, and makes him perfect, even as our father, which is in heaven is perfect; which gives a holiness to all his virtues, and hides his defects and imperfections. It is a qualification of mind, which gives a lustre and ornament to our religion on earth, and glorifies our father which

is in heaven. In short, all the good by which human life is adorned and made happy, in a great measure springs from it; and without it, it is no more possible for a reasonable creature to be made happy, than it is to distinguish colours without sight; almost all other virtues and perfections are to be done away, when that which is perfect, is come. But charity, or universal love is a perfection which shall never fail—Charity, says the apostle, never faileth.—The love of God, and of all mankind, which began in us in this life, will, in the next state, grow into perfection, and remain forever to be the very life of that happiness, which abideth for us in the kingdom of God. These several considerations ought to influence persons, of every rank and condition in life, of every sect and persuasion, to the observance of this great duty. To you, my brethren, who to these several motives, have added the open confession of the universal benevolence of God, and the consequent final happiness of mankind—who believe all men to be equally children of God and heirs of grace, I more particularly address myself at present. The fundamental principle of the doctrine you uphold, is LOVE. Let your actions correspond with the principle. By strictly adhering to it, evidence to the world, the high value you set upon the professions you have made—the tenets you have adopted. Evince the beauty and excellence of universalism, by shewing that it is not a mere name, or an idle speculative fancy, but an active, vigorous principle, able to produce worthy fruits, conducing to your welfare, and the benefit of others.

Since a perfect and undisturbed harmony is a thing, rather to be wished, than expected, in the present state; since it must needs be, that offences come; and through the wickedness of some, the misapprehensions and prejudices of others, and the infirmities of all, injuries will often be offered, and much oftener imagined; let it be your chief en-

deavour, to stop the progress of malice and revenge, and to make up those differences, which you are not able entirely to prevent. Be always ready to forgive injuries, whenever the aggressor shews an honest desire to be reconciled.—Impress this principle deep in your hearts, that indiscretion in him, cannot exercise want of charity in you. Let it not be said that any of you repines at the prosperity of even his enemy, much less of his neighbour, but, that you shew a pleasing satisfaction at seeing an honest man thrive, or a man of merit rewarded, whatever may be his religious opinions; let not prosperity so far exalt you, as to look down upon those, in a lower situation, with contempt, or to forget the duties, which are equally due to the poor, and to the rich. Be ready to contribute to the necessities of all around you, according to your different abilities. In administering this comfort or assistance, use the utmost delicacy and caution, lest you, by any means, hurt the feelings of the receiver. In your common dealings with mankind, be just, candid, and true. As to your behaviour towards those, who differ from you in religious opinion, these few words may suffice:—It is the duty of a servant of the Lord, not to strive, but to be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those, that oppose themselves.—*For the wrath of man, worketh not the righteousness of God.* Since love and charity, peace and unity, are things most highly, and in a particular manner pleasing to God, and no less advantageous and beneficial to ourselves; let the promotion of these, in public and in private, be the chief care and endeavour of every one of you, in his proper station. * * *

FOR THE CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

One of the most conclusive arguments, that the doctrine of Universal

Benevolence has no tendency, whatever, to break down in its professors, the barriers of virtue and morality, and lead them to an unrestrained indulgence in licentiousness, is, that on the list of those, who, after a careful examination of its evidences, have subscribed to it, will be found some of the most distinguished names that have ever adorned the annals of the christian world;—distinguished not for the adventitious circumstances of birth, or worldly greatness, but, for their acquirements in knowledge and virtue, and their ever active benevolence towards their fellow creatures.

To enumerate all, who have adopted this doctrine, even in modern times, would far exceed the limits of this essay, we shall, therefore, content ourselves with noticing a few, the celebrity of whose names, must render their characters well known to all our readers.

And, first on our list, we will place our own illustrious FRANKLIN, a man, equally estimable for his private virtues, as his public services.—For the morality, as the usefulness of all his writings. His sentiments with respect to religion may be collected from many of his publications, but particularly from his private correspondence. His belief was, that the soul of man “will be treated with justice in another life, respecting its conduct in this,”* but, the punishment it may suffer will be for its good. “I content myself,” he writes to the celebrated Whitfield,† in submitting to the will of that God who made me, and who has hitherto preserved and blessed me, and in *whose fatherly goodness I may well confide*, that he will *never make me miserable*; and that, even the afflictions I may at *any period* suffer shall tend to my *benefit*.” This sentiment is reiterated in different letters, to different individuals. Dr. Franklin, was a believer, also, in the simple humanity of Christ.

The amiable, the philanthropic Dr. LETTSONE, of London, whose life was one continued scene of usefulness to his countrymen, particularly of the poorer classes, and whose private character was unimpeachable, was also

a Universalist.—“He acknowledged” says his accomplished relative and Biographer, Pettigrew, “no God but ONE, no heaven but *universal happiness*; no religion but that of doing good; and, though he knew how to set a proper value on theological opinions, he held that a *good life*, is the soundest orthodoxy, and the most benevolent man, the best christian.”* Dr. Lettsone expressed his belief in the universality of the benevolence of God, in all his dispensations towards his creatures, in several of his private letters, published in connexion with his biography.

In mentioning the name of RUSH, no eulogium will be requisite, to proclaim his virtues, and his public services,—to all his countrymen both are well known,—the former, they will ever remember with pride, and the latter with unfeigned gratitude—No one, who has perused the writings of the great and good man, can be ignorant of his full belief in the doctrine of universal benevolence, and of the corrective nature of all punishment, which God does or will inflict on sinful man; there is scarce one of them that does not breath these sentiments, but they are more particularly noted in his literary and moral essays, and in his private letters, in some of which latter he calls the universalist doctrine, “our doctrine.”

The sound philosopher, and the good and pious man, were united in the character of the celebrated DAVID RITTENHOUSE, “whose name is known and admired in every region of the earth, where science and genius are cultivated and respected,” and, “whose virtues were never obscured in any situation or stage of life, by a single cloud of weakness or of vice,” and who was another illustrious believer in the universal benevolence of God,† and as a natural effect of his belief in the relation of the *whole human race* to each other, in a common FATHER and REDEEMER, he embraced the whole family of mankind in the arms of his benevolence.†

Of Dr. SHIPPEN one of the fathers of the present medical school in the university of Pennsylvania, and whom all who knew, loved and respected, it is thus remarked by his amiable biographer, the justly admired and lament-

ed Wistar. “He was educated in the doctrines of the Presbyterian church; but he now (after returning from practice) read and thought much upon the subject of *Universal Restoration*; and finally adopted that belief, with great confidence.”*

Last on this, though not least, we may enumerate Dr. CASPER WISTAR, whom we once looked up to as a friend and preceptor, and who in all conversations on the subject of religion, professed to be a believer in the equal love of God to all his creatures, and as a necessary consequence of his belief in this doctrine, benevolence was the most predominant feature in his character;” It was a feeling which seems never to have forsaken him, beginning, as it ought, with his own family, and extending to the whole human race.”†

I have selected the above particular instances, to repel by a display of their virtues, and unblemished character, the approbrium which has been cast against the doctrine of the universality of the restoration of mankind from sin, by the orthodox of the day, as a doctrine productive of vice and immorality in its professors, and dangerous to the well being of society, not because the list is confined to them, but, because their characters are so well established, and their virtues so generally known, that the mouth of slander can have no opportunity to attack them, however great may be its desire when it shall be discovered that they coincide in religious sentiment with those whom the “self righteous and highly favoured” of our times, hold to be “publicans and sinners”—despisers of morality, and advocates for vice.

After perusing the evidence which is now laid before them, it is confidently expected, that those who have heretofore reviled and despised us, will be now convinced that the profession and firm belief, that the time will come when sin shall no more be known throughout the universe, is not incompatible with the possession of the most exalted virtue, but, on the contrary, is a powerful incentive to morality, and benevolence.

* See letter to the Rev. President Stiles, dated March 1790.

† In a letter dated June 1753.

* See Pettigrew's life and writings of Lettsone.

† See Rush's Eulogium on David Rittenhouse.

* See Wistar's Eulogium on Dr. William Shippen.

† See chief justice Tilghman's Eulogium before the American Philosophical Society.

Christian Messenger.

Philadelphia, Saturday, February 24, 1821.

FROM THE UNITARIAN MISCELLANY.

*Abstract of Unitarian Belief.**Concluded from page 116.*

We believe the Holy Ghost, or Holy Spirit, was the spirit of God, and not a person, or being, or substance, distinct from God. When communicated to men, it was a supernatural gift, the energy and power of God operating on their minds, giving new light to their understanding, and increasing their natural intelligence and wisdom. That the Holy Spirit is not a person, is evident from the various characteristics attributed to it in the Scriptures. It is said to be *poured out, shed forth, given without measure, and in portions*. Men are said to *drink* into it, and it is at one time represented as being *taken away*, and at another as *quenched*. But none of these things are applicable to a person. And more especially, if the Holy Spirit were a person, and at the same time God, these characteristics would be absurd and impossible. You cannot say of God, that he is shed forth, taken away, or quenched. Men are often said, also, to be "filled with the Holy Spirit." But how can a man be filled with a person, or with God. There is one text very decided on this subject. "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father, neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him."* But how would this be true, if the Holy Spirit were a person, equal with the Father and the Son? Would not the Spirit know both the Father and the Son, and this without any revelation? In short, we think, if the scriptures prove any thing, it is, that the Holy Spirit so often mentioned in them, is a supernatural influence communicated to men by the power and agency of God.

From this short abstract may be seen the opinions of unitarians, as they differ from many other christians, on the subject of the trinity. What the most prevalent opinions are, at the present day, respecting the doctrine of the trinity,

is not easy to ascertain. There are almost as many theories, and modes of explanation, as there have been writers on the subject. This circumstance itself would lead almost any thinking man to suspect its soundness. A fundamental doctrine of revealed religion, it would be supposed, ought to be one, to which christians can fix some definite character, and of which they can unite in some consistent explanation. But, unhappily, no doctrine has so completely eluded the attempts of its advocates to define and explain, upon any intelligible principles, as that of the trinity.

The proposition is laid down, that "in the unity of the Godhead there be three persons of one substance, power, and eternity, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost;" but when we have asked to have this proposition made intelligible, and inquired how it is possible, that there should be two other beings equal in "substance, power, and eternity" with the Father, and not make together with him three Gods, we have never received an answer any more satisfactory, than the proposition itself. When we have asked for scripture proof, we have been referred to texts, whose language bears no resemblance to that in which the doctrine is stated, and which oftentimes have very little, if any, relation to the subject. As a last resort, we are conducted to the hidden places of mystery, and gravely told, that this profound doctrine was never intended to be fathomed by human powers, and that we must be very cautious how we suffer a vain curiosity to betray us into presumptuous inquiries. This, to be sure, in the language of Solomon, is "the end of the whole matter;" for nothing is more idle, than to reason with a man, who tells you he has given up the use of his reason. But the Unitarian doctrines are rational and scriptural; they can be defined and explained; they involve no contradictions they never take refuge in mysteries, but are supported by the plain and positive truths of the sacred writings; they have no delight in darkness; their strength is best seen and tried in the light of open day; they will never shrink from inspection, nor retire from any manly and honourable contest to vindicate their pretensions, or substantiate their authority.

Our limits will not allow us at present to give the unitarian views of several other doctrines, which are thought important by some christians. These we shall consider at large as occasions may offer hereafter. We have only room to state, that we do not believe "the guilt of Adam's sin was imputed, and his corrupted nature conveyed to all his posterity;" nor that there is in men any "original corruption, whereby they are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil." This doctrine makes God the author of sin, and the punisher of crimes in men, which he has rendered it impossible they should not commit. We do not believe, that "by the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death," because this destroys the free agency and accountability of man, and makes God an arbitrary, partial, and unjust being. We do not believe, "that Christ has once offered himself up a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God," because, this is making the innocent suffer for the guilty, and appeasing the wrath of a Being who, in his very nature, is necessarily benevolent, merciful, and good. Moreover, this plan of reconciliation by way of a purchase, bargain, or covenant, effectually destroys the doctrine of salvation by the free grace of God, which we think most clearly taught throughout the scriptures. If the guilt of sin be removed by the voluntary sufferings of an innocent being, there is no room for the exercise of grace. The demands of justice are answered to the utmost. Nor is any thing left for the sinner to do; for it is absurd to talk about repentance, and righteousness, as terms of pardon, after it has been declared, that we are pardoned on the grounds of a covenanted sacrifice. But one of the strongest reasons why we have no faith in these doctrines, is, that we find no proof of them in the word of God.

We believe men have in themselves the power of being good or bad, of meriting the rewards, or deserving the punishments of a just God. Christ has revealed to us the will, the moral government, the perfections of God, and the certainty of a future state of

* Matth. xi. 27.

retribution. He has made known the rules of duty, and the terms of salvation. He has set before us the most powerful motives to obedience, and the consequences of wilful sin, and impenitence.

With this light, and these aids, we are left to choose the evil or the good; to neglect the warnings of the gospel, and incur the penalties of transgression, or to repent, turn from iniquities, seek the favour of God, trust with confidence in his promised mercies, and secure the rewards of immortal glory.

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REMARKS.

We stated at the commencement of the "Abstract of Unitarian Belief" that Unitarians differ in nothing from Universalists, so far as they are consistent with themselves. It will be proper for us here to explain what we meant by that observation. We shall therefore add the following remarks.

In all the doctrines peculiar to Unitarians, we agree with them; that is to say, we agree to all that is stated in the above "Abstract," except a few ideas advanced in the two last paragraphs.

A part of that, to which we object, has been noticed by one of the Unitarians themselves, in the second number of the "Miscellany;" viz. "We believe men have in themselves the power of being good or bad, of *meriting* the rewards, or deserving the punishments of a just God." A Unitarian Christian proposes to amend this by saying, "We believe that God has given to men the power of being good or bad, of becoming *fit* for happiness, or of subjecting themselves to punishment." Whether this will be satisfactory to the author of the "Abstract," or not, does not yet appear. We should rather say, "God has given to men powers and faculties, in the exercise of which they may render themselves either happy or miserable."

The idea of "a future state of retribution" is not peculiar to "Unitarian Belief;" because a man may be a Unitarian without it; and he may also believe in such a state and yet not be a Unitarian. The Scriptures, therefore, ought to have been stated on which

such "Belief" is founded. The general scripture doctrine of rewards and punishments does not prove this unless it can be shewn that any, or all such passages must refer to a future state of existence. This is what Unitarians do not (as we have seen) attempt to do.

But what is most objectionable in the above paragraphs, is, the idea of *securing* "the rewards of immortal glory." What is meant by this? That *immortality* is not yet "secure?" and that it is to be secured by something which we must do? If so, what, after all, has been revealed to us? merely to tell us that we have an opportunity to secure "immortal glory?" and is this all that we are to understand by the "good tidings of great joy which shall be unto all people?" Such gospel would be but poor consolation to us, who believe that when we have done all, we are still unprofitable servants, we have done no more than our duty.

It may be asked, what circumstance, in relation to a future state, can we now make any more "secure," either by our faith or good works? Shall we be any more certain, of a resurrection? or, if raised, shall we be made immortal by those means? Or does the happiness of immortality depend on any thing which we can now do to "secure" that happiness? These, and many other considerations which we might suggest, lead us to believe, that all that relates to a future state is pure gospel, i. e. good news! the truth of which does not depend in the least degree on any works of righteousness which we have done, (or which we expect to do,) but according to the abundant mercy of God.

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From the Post-Boy.

Religion.—The following sentiments of an able divine deserve attention:

"It is an error to believe that devotion nourishes a spirit of severity in judging of the manners and characters of others. Under this reproach, indeed, it has so long suffered in the world, that, with two many, the appellation of devout, suggests no other character, but that of a sour, recluse bigot, who delights in censure. But the reproach is unjust; for such a spirit is entirely opposite to the nature of true devotion. The very first traces it imprints on the mind, are candor and

humility. Its principles are liberal. Its genius 'is unassuming and mild. Severe only to itself, it makes every allowance to others, which humanity can suggest. It claims no privilege of looking into their hearts, or of deciding with respect to their eternal state. If your supposed devotion produce contrary effects; if it infuse harshness into your sentiments, and acrimony into your speech, you may conclude, that under a serious appearance, carnal passions lurk. And if ever it shall so far lift you up with self conceit, as to make you establish your own opinions as an infallible standard for the whole christian world, and lead you to consign to perdition, all who differ from you, either in some doctrinal tenets, or in the mode of expressing them; you may rest assured that to much pride you have joined much ignorance of the gospel of Christ."

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MERCY.

Ever gentle, ever fair:
Mercy, with thy placid air;
With thy bosom bursting sigh;
With thy tear bedewed eye;
With thy heart forever prone
To redress the wretches' moan;
Willing footsteps hither bend,
Human nature's faithful friend,
Who does all offences see,
Thro' the glass of charity:
Of thy soft'ning touch debarr'd,
Human heart's alas! how hard:—
Thou canst melt at other's woes;
Thou canst smile upon thy foes;
Thou canst feel for the oppress'd;
Thou canst grieve for the distressed.
Nor does thy attention fail
To the soft pathetic tale;—
Though a fiction in disguise,
Gen'rous streams o'erflow thine eyes,
Human crimes still prompt to lave,
Like Betherda's haling wave.
Ah! who would thy charms forgo
For the gaudy phantom show?
Who would covet to be blest
By the pangs of the distressed?
Men, like these, their peace destroy,
Cankers eat their buds of joy.
What does all such actions bring?
Conscience, with a scorpion's sting!—
Who would wants pale visage see,
Yet consult frugality?
Where's the wretch would hardness show,
To a being pinch'd by woe?
Or, with sternness shut his door
To the crying of the poor?
Gates of heaven on him are clos'd,
Who is deaf to human woes.
Mercy's gate who cannot ope,
Through the gloom can see no hope,
Since 'tis mercy gains the prize,
Mercy, and not sacrifice.